

April 8, 2008 Thornberry Questions Petraeus & Crocker

Transcript of the questions posed by Congressman Mac Thornberry, Ranking Member on the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Terrorism and Unconventional Threats, to General David Petraeus, commander of Multi-National Forces-Iraq, and U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker during the House Armed Services Committee April 8, 2008 briefing.

THORNBERRY:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General, today and some yesterday, there have been calls to declassify recent intelligence community assessment. And kind of left hanging is this implication that there's something radically different in this assessment than in your public testimony today.

So I guess I'd just like to ask briefly, do you take intelligence community products into account in writing your public testimony?

And is there's thing substantially different in that particular assessment from the thrust of your public testimony that you've given today?

PETRAEUS:

We do take it into account. In fact, you know, we draw very heavily, obviously, on our own intelligence assessments as well, but certain take it into account, and there is not any difference that I'm aware of, having looked at that fairly quickly, between what that says and what we have said.

And I'm not the one who does declassification of intelligence documents.

THORNBERRY:

I understand.

Let me go to, I think, maybe a larger point. General, in your testimony, you talked about -- the gradual establishment of sustainable security in Iraq is vitally important to the citizens of the United States.

And Ambassador, in your testimony, you said we have to be clear with ourselves about what failure would mean.

The American people don't hear that sort of talk very much. What they hear is what happened today on the ground with this bombing or this suicide bomber, and that's if something happened on the ground. If it's relatively quiet, they don't get any news.

And I think it's important for them to hear from each of you why Iraq is important, what we have at stake, not just what we're doing for them, but why it's important for us.

So I would invite you both to elaborate on the comments that you made in your written testimony.

PETRAEUS:

Well, again, Congressman, I think we have an enormous national interest in the security and stability of Iraq, with respect, as I've mentioned, to Al Qaida Iraq and Al Qaida in that particular area, the possible resumption of sectarian conflict that could not only engulf Iraq once again, but also potentially spread over Iraq's borders.

Some of your members have rightly noted that there is already a humanitarian crisis in Iraq. There are already, by most accounts, somewhere around two million internally displaced and two million others displaced out of the country. That could get far, far worse.

In fact, we have seen some signs of reversal of that, of the security conditions allowing some citizens to return to their homes and their families.

Again, there is certainly a regional stability issue and there's, obviously, an issue in terms of the global economy, with Iraq being the second or third most -- the country with the second or third most oil resources in the world.

CROCKER:

Congressman, both General Petraeus and I have spoken about the costs of failure. I'd like to spend just a moment on how a stable and secure Iraq could transform the region.

For most of Iraq's modern history, since the 1958 revolution, Iraq has been a negative factor for regional stability. And indeed, that revolution in '58 and our concerns over where it was going is what triggered the decision to send Marines to Lebanon.

So over the course of the years, we saw the Iran-Iraq war. We saw the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the threat to Saudi Arabia, Iraqi subversion in Syria, in Jordan, in Lebanon. We have an unbroken saga of destabilizing actions or outright military invasions.

A stable Iraq, in my judgment -- and I've spent a lot of time in this region -- could be an anchor in the Arab world and the broader Middle East, and we could have a positive dynamic throughout the region that we really haven't seen for decades.

I can't predict, you know, what the specific consequences of that would be, but it would be a far more positive dynamic than we have seen in literally decades.